The Daily Star

JULY UPRISING

FROM QUOTA TO STATE REFORM

What began as a student-led movement for quota reform quickly escalated into a mass uprising demanding the end of Sheikh Hasina's 15-year regime. Over the course of three weeks, the government's violent suppression of protests resulted in the deaths of hundreds of unarmed citizens and injuries to thousands more, leading to a unified call for her resignation. This timeline chronicles the events that led to her eventual downfall.

TIMELINE

MARCH 2018

Students from various universities took to the streets demanding a reduction in quota-based positions, merit-based recruitment for vacant quota posts, and equal age limits for all job seekers. 56 percent of government jobs were reserved for candidates from various quotas. Of that, 30 percent were kept for freedom fighters children and grandchildren, 10 percent for women, 10 percent for people of districts lagging behind, 5 percent for members of indigenous communities, and 1 percent for physically-challenged people. The protestors demanded reform, saying that the current system was disproportionate and hinders opportunities for qualified candidates.

Ignoring the growing protests, Sheikh Hasina, on March 21, says the quota system would remain.

APRIL 2018

As part of their protest, thousands of university students from all over Bangladesh start to boycott classes, take out processions and block highways. At least 75 people are injured as deadly clashes take place between police and students in the second week of April, turning the capital's Shahbagh intersection and its adjacent areas into a battlefield.

On April 11, Hasina announces that the whole system is to be scrapped.

JUNE-JULY 2018

On June 30, members of the quota reform movement were violently attacked by members of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the Bangladesh Awami League, on the Dhaka University campus. Law enforcers downplay the violence and arrest a number of quota reform leaders.

OCTOBER 3 2018

The cabinet approves the decision to abolish the quota system for for class-I and class-II jobs in the civil service, saying that employment will only be based on merit and that the government holds the authority to consider quotas for disadvanatged communities.

JUNE 5 2024

Following a petition from freedom fighter's families, the High Court declares the 2018 government decision to cancel the 30 percent quota for freedom fighter's children and grandchildren illegal, effectively reinstating the quota. In response, students stage protests in six universities. In Dhaka, students gather in front of the central library of Dhaka University and rally to Shaheed Minar to execute a short assembly.

JULY 2-6 2024

Students of Dhaka University organise under the banner of "Students against Discrimination" and stage a demonstration in the TSC area demanding reinstatement of the 2018 government circular that scrapped the quota system in civil service.

Over the next few days, protests spread to other parts of the country. From Dhaka, to Jahangirnagar University, Jagannath University, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Barishal University andChittagong University, students brought out processions and held rallies in and around their campuses.

On July 4, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court decides to uphold the June 5 High Court verdict. On July 6, students call for "Bangla Blockade" from the next day.

JULY 7 2024

Dhaka comes to a standstill as students ramp up their protests against the quota system, blocking as many as six busy intersections. Sheikh Hasina terms the protests irrational, saying the issue should be settled at the apex court.

JULY 8 2024

Blockades and protests intensify, creating severe difficulties for Dhaka residents and inter-district travelers. Demonstrators assert their lone demand for the complete elimination of all illogical and discriminatory quotas in public service through the enactment of a new law.

JULY 10 2024

On July 10, The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court issued a temporary halt to the reinstatement of the quota system in government jobs, which meant the decision of the 2018 government circular abolishing quotas would remain in effect for the next four weeks.

Despite this ruling, student protesters are determined to continue their demonstrations until the government commits to reforming the quota system through a dedicated commission and subsequent legislation.

JULY 11 2024

The High Court says that the government retains the authority to modify the quota system for public sector jobs and that they can fill vacant positions through a general merit list if quota allocations remain unfilled. Students say they would continue their demonstrations until parliament enacts a law to reform the quota system.

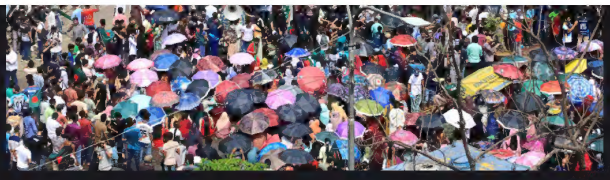
Ignoring police warnings and minister's calls to step back, anti-quota protesters go ahead with "Bangla Blockade", leading to sporadic clashes with law enforcers.

JULY 12 2024

Demonstrators block the capital's Shahbagh intersection, protesting police action on students outside Dhaka and reiterating their demand for reforming the quota system. The law minister warns protesters that the government would be forced to take action if the agitation continues.

JULY 13 2024

State Minister for Information, Mohammad Ali Arafat, says that the government cannot form a commission on quota reform or make any announcements, as the matter is currently under judicial consideration. At the same time, government representatives from different agencies and the ruling party hint at holding "unofficial talks" with the protesting students, seeking to get their views on the "right percentages" of quota in



government jobs.

JULY 14 2024

In response to a reporter's question, Sheikh Hasina makes the controversial remark, that compares the protestors to "razakars", who were collaborators of the Pakistani Army in 1971. Her words cause an uproar and catalyse several demonstrations across different campuses, with students chanting "Tui ke? Ami ke? Razakar, Razakar! Ke boleche, ke boleche? Shoirachar, shoirachar! "[Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, Razakar! Who said so? Who said so? Dictator, dictator!]

JULY 15 2024

The Awami League focuses on the protester's use of the word Razakar. AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader says, "Chhatra League will give a fitting reply to those student leaders of the quota reform movement who last night labelled themselves Razakars and showed arrogance", essentially givng the green signal to BCL to use violence on the protesters. Sheikh Hasina says, "I felt sorry when I heard the students of Ruqayyah Hall calling themselves Razakars." while referring to some gruesome incidents carried out by the Pakistan forces in 1971. Chhatra League and other ruling party activists start to attack quota proteste at Dhaka University. They also attack wounded demonstrators inside and outside Dhaka Medical College Hospital. More than 300 people are injured on both sides.

JULY 16 2024

At least six are killed in fierce clashes between protesting students and law enforcers joined in by ruling party activists in Dhaka, Chattogram and Rangpur. All universities, colleges and secondary schools are shut down for indefinite period and students are asked to vacate their halls. The government deploys BGB (Border Guard Bangladesh) in 6 districts. Students take control of most DU and RU halls and vandalise BCL leader's rooms.

In Rangpur, an unarmed student protestor, Abu Sayed of Begum Rokeya University, is shot and killed in front of his campus by police, as he stood in front of them with his arms wide open. A video of the incident spreads on the internet.

JULY 17 2024

Police attack students at Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University and Rajshahi University during an "absentee funeral" for student martyrs. Students decalre a nationwide complete shutdown starting the next day, demanding that all establishments, except hospitals and emergency services, close, and that only ambulances are allowed on the roads. They urge students from all educational institutions to join the protest and call on ordinary citizens to support them.

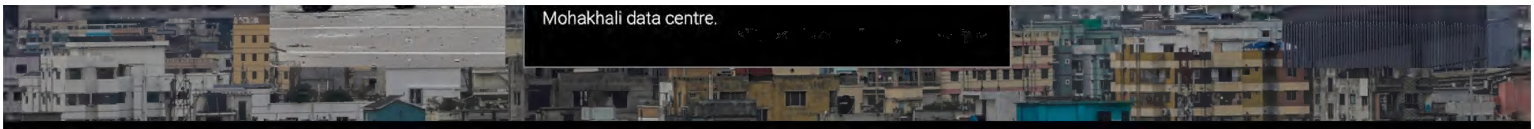
Sheikh Hasina addresses the nation urging protesters to keep faith in the judicial system and announces a judicial probe into the killings. She urged the students to remain alert so that infiltrators cannot create anarchy by taking shelter among the protesters.

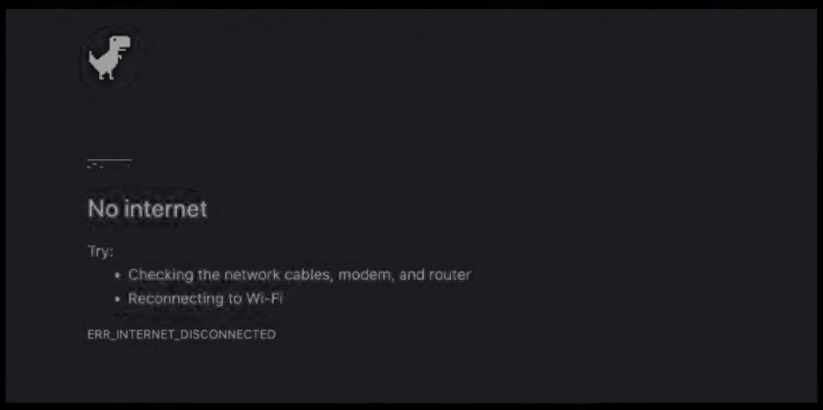
JULY 18 2024

Police and BCL men attack students at Brac University and other campuses. At least 29 people are killed in the violence as clashes break out in 19 districts. Metro rail operations are suspended for an indefinite period.

By afternoon, mobile internet service is blocked across the country. Agitators vandalise and set fire to BTV Bhaban, Setu Bhaban and other government establishments. The Banani toll plaza of the Dhaka Elevated Expressway is set on fire in the evening. Law enforcement meets agitators with force.

Around 9pm, Internet service providers (ISPs) and carriers are ordered to shut down internet service. The country is under complete internet blackout, effectively disconnecting Bangladesh from the rest of the world. In public, government officials, including State Minister for ICT Palak, blame the internet outages on a fire in a





JULY 19 2024

Daylong violence kills around 66 people. and hundreds more are injured across the country, as violence escalates. After Friday prayers, clashes intensify across the country, especially in Dhaka's Badda, Rampura, Uttara, Jatrabari, and Mohammadpur. More public establishments, including Narsingdi jail, metro rail stations, BRTA offices are vandalised and torched.

Student coordinators announce nine-point demand, which includes Sheikh Hasina's apology, resignation of certain ministers and university VCs, punishment for BCL and police members involved in attacks, compensation for victims, and legal protection for protesters

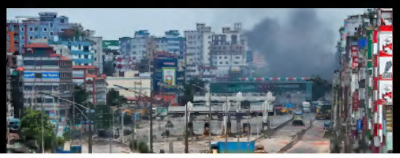
Effective from midnight, government announces nationwide curfew and deploys army.

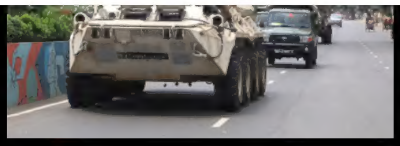
JULY 20 2024

At least 21 people are killed on the first day of curfew amid army deployment. Curfew is extended until further notice and a two-day general public holiday is announced.

Three coordinators meet three ministers presenting an eight-point demand, which vary on key points from nine-point demand announced earlier.

Late at night, Nahid Islam, a key organisers of the anti-discrimination student movement, is forcibly taken by plainclothes persons from a house in Sabujbagh.





Dawn

JULY 21 2024

Nahid Islam wakes up to find himself under a bridge in Purbachal. He alleges he was blindfolded and taken to an unknown location where he was tortured until he was unconscious. He was treated for severe pain and deep bruises on his left thigh and shoulder.

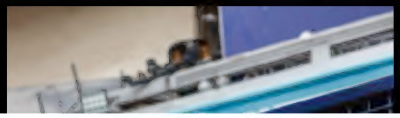
Supreme Court curtails quotas to 7 percent and at least seven people are killed amid curfew. Chiefs of three forces meet Hasina, as UN, EU, UK voice concern over violence.

JULY 22 2024

Over three days, police raids see law enforcers arrest 1,427 people in connection with the violence. Around 50 cases are filed with different police stations accusing 20,000 unidentified people of resorting to violence. Scores of BNP and Jamaat aligned people are arrested on suspicion of conspiracy and violence.

JULY 23 2024

Government issues a circular reforming



quota system, allowing 93 percent of the recruitment at government, semi-government and autonomous bodies to be based on merit. However, quota reform protest organisers reject it, demanding justice for deaths and injuries that took occurred during the protests. Arrests and raids targeting opposition leaders and demonstrators continue amid curfew. Broadband internet returns in select areas.

JULY 24 2024

Three quota protest coordinators, Dhaka University's Asif Mahmud, Abu Baker Mazumder and Rifat Rashid, are found after five days. On their social media, they recount getting picked up by unidentified individuals, being blindfolded, drugged and pressured into announcing an end to the protests.

JULY 25 2024

Hasina makes first public appearance since army deployment and visits damaged metro rail station, urging people to resist arson and vandalism. But, her focus on property damage over human lives further enrages protestors and the general population. Jatiya Party leader, Partha Andaleeve, and businessman David Hasnat, among dozens, are arrested, as social media remains off-limits. UN, Amnesty International, US, Canada call for end to crackdown.

JULY 26 2024

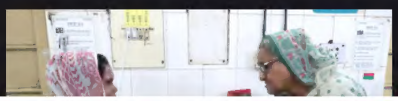
Detective Branch (DB) of police pick up three organisers, who had been taken and released once before, from the hospital where they were being treated. BNP calls for national unity and ouster of government. Hasina visits Dhaka Medical College Hospital on the second day of public appearance after the curfew announcement. Police FIR on Abu Sayeed killing mentions protester's brickbats and weapons, not police fire, as the cause of death.

JULY 27 2024

Block raids targeting protesters, mostly students, continue as DB picks up two more quota protest organisers. They allege it is for security reasons. Fourteen foreign missions urges the government to hold law enforcers accountable. 17 year old Hasnatul Islam Faiyaz, is seen tied up with rope and taken on a seven-day remand in connection to a vandalism case. Hasina visits Pongu Hospital to visit victims and continues to state that outside agitators were behind the violence to cripple economy.

JULY 28 2024

Nationwide crackdown continues, with over 213,000 people implicated in more than 200 cases in Dhaka alone. While mobile internet is restored, social media restrictions remain. Six detained protest leaders were seen dining with Dhaka Metropolitan Police chief Harunor Rashid in a social media post. They subsequently announce the end of the movement in a written statement. However, other organizers outside vowed to continue the protests, saying the six in custody were forced to make a statement. The government officially confirmed a death toll of 147.



JULY 29 2024

Students take to the streets again to protest the detention and harassment of the six coordinators. They are met with stun grenades and teargas from the police Government announces plan to ban Jamaat-Shibir. HC rebukes DB over handling of the six quota organisers, asking them "Not to mock the nation". Supreme Court lawyers Aynunnahar Siddiqua and Manzur-Al-Matin file a petition seeking orders to have the six protesters released immediately and to stop the use of bullets against protesters.

JULY 30 2024

A day of national mourning is called by government in remembrance of those killed in the violence. All places of worship including mosques, temples, and churches are asked to hold special prayers for the deceased.

Coordinators of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement call on people to cover their faces with red pieces of cloth and upload their photos online as a rejection of the government's call for nationwide mourning. Facebook is flooded with the colour red as scores of Bangladeshi users change their profile pictures to a solid field of red as a symbolic gesture of solidarity with the students.

More groups of citizens start to join the protests as teachers of several universities hold rallies, parents stand in solidarity protesting the killing of children, and eminent citizens publicly demand accountability from the government for the loss of lives.

JULY 31 2024

Protesters stage a "March for Justice," which police try to block using teargas, stun grenades, and batons. At the Dhaka High Court premises, a group of lawyers stand in support of protesters, as do groups of university teachers across the country. Six quota movement organisers remain in DB custody. Eminent citizens form a probe body and call for public support. The EU delays partnership talks with Dhaka. Hundreds of HSC students announce a boycott of exams if fellow examinees are not released from police custody and jail.

AUGUST 1 2024

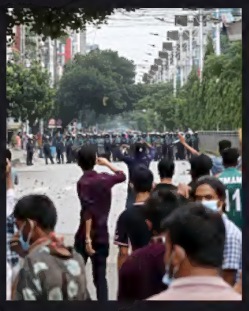
Government issues a gazette banning Jamaat-Shibir under anti-terrorism act. UN offers to send a fact-finding team, which Sheikh Hasina welcomes, saying, "UN free to probe violence". The six organisers are freed from DB custody. Protesters hold mass processions and prayers for those killed.

AUGUST 2 2024

Two more die in clashes between AL activists, police and protestors and demonstrators continue to protest killings and police crackdown.

Thousands of people from students to teachers, guardians with children, lawyers, civil society members, and political activists join "Droho Jatra" from the National Press Club to Shaheed Minar, seeking justice for those killed during the recent violence. Members of cultural organisations,and several cultural personalities recite poems, sing songs, and stage street dramas expressing solidarity with the protest.

Protesters announce countrywide movement and non-cooperation movement from August 4. Facebook is blocked again for seven hours.The six organisers say their statement of withdrawal from the DB office had been involuntary. Sheikh Hasina invites protestors saying, her doors to Gonobhaban are open for discussion.



AUGUST 3 2024

Numbers of protestors swell as thousands of ordinary citizens converge in Dhaka's Central Shaheed Minar to express solidarity with the student's demands. In other parts of the country, protestors are met with brutal police violence.

The Anti Discrimination Student Movement announce a one-point demand for the government's resignation.

AUGUST 4 2024

AL men deploy across the country, sparking violent clashes with protesters. At least 93 people, including protesters, police, and AL supporters, die nationwide. Homes of ministers and MPs face attacks. Prime Minister Hasina calls for the public "resist saboteurs with an iron hand." Teachers outline plans for an interim government following the AL's resignation. Protesters calls for citizens from across the country for a "March to Dhaka". Originally planned for the 6th, the organisers shift it a day earlier.

AUGUST 5 2024

Thousands defy the curfew, attempting to gather at multiple Dhaka intersections and enter the capital. Violent clashes erupt with law enforcement and ruling party supporters. Despite initial demands for increased force, the Prime Minister is informed that such measures would be ineffective. A nationwide internet blackout is imposed between 10am

and 1:30pm, with an announcement from the Amry Cheif that he will be addressing the public. Following discussions with family members, the Prime Minister agrees to resign, and flees the country on a helicopter. Thousands breach Gonobhaban, the parliament building, and the PMO, and gather on the streets, to celebrate the fall of Sheikh Hasina.

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